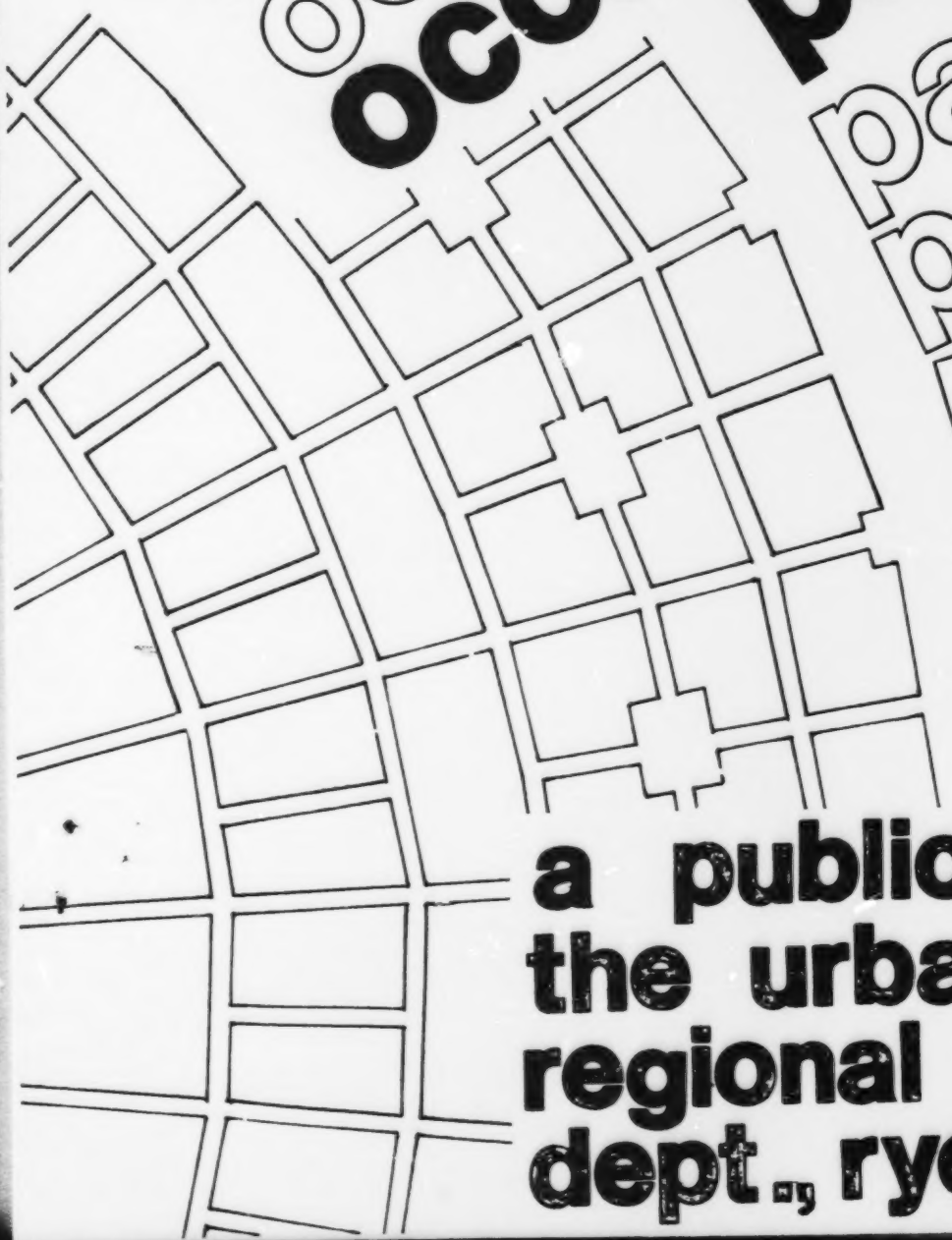
occasional papers



a publication of the urban and regional planning dept., ryerson

URBANIZATION IN ECUADOR: GENERAL COMMENTS

Lawrence Altrows

Department of Urban and Regional Planning
Ryerson Polytechnical Insitute
Toronto, Ontario

OCCASIONAL PAPER NO. 8
March 1982

TABLE OF COMMENTS

A. INTRODUCTION 1

B. HISTORY AND POPULATION 3

1. Population and Its Distribution 4

2. Quito 6

3. Guayaquil 10

C. RURAL-URBAN MIGRATION 12

1. Theoretical Base 13

D. SQUATTERS AND POLITICAL MOVEMENTS 26

E. SUMMARY 28

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR

URBANIZATION IN ECUADOR: GENERAL COMMENTS

INTRODUCTION

A.

Ecuador is relatively unknown to most people and is often imagined to be a poor country of impenetrable steamy jungles lying somewhere around the earth's equatorial zone. Two of the reasons which may explain this lack of awareness of Ecuador have to do with its small size and relative isolation. As its name implies, Ecuador stradles the Equator on the west side of South America. In area it contains a mere 283,520 km^2, making it the second smallest republic in South America after Uraguay and considerably smaller than its neighbours, Peru to the south, Columbia to the north and the giant of Brazil to the east.

Ecuador is not, in fact, a uniformly tropical country, and comprises three distinct geographical regions, each of which exhibits a unique cultural identity and different economic base.

These three divisions are:

1. The hot coastal zone which stretches from the humid north to the desert-like south and inland for approximately 60-70 miles from the Pacific Ocean.
2. The great Andean or Sierra area with its two massive walls, one on the west and the other on the east, rising to snow-capped heights of over 6,000 meters, with intermontane basins of varying depths and widths between them.

3. ~~The~~ Amazon basin area or the Oriente to the east of the Sierra; an area of dense jungle and rain forest. This is part of the immense drainage area of the Amazon River.

Climate is an important variable in Ecuador and is determined by two principal factors. The Humbolt current sweeps up from the Antarctic carrying enormous quantities of frigid sea water and cool air. When the cool air passes over the hot land it is warmed and its retaining capacity for moisture increased. Thus, the rainfall of the western coast is dependent on the course the current follows and where it predominates, arid conditions prevail and agriculture is severely hampered.

The other factor is altitude. It is a rather unnerving experience to find oneself shivering with cold while standing on the earth's equator but this occurs at 3,000 meters where temperatures descend to close to $0^{o}C$ at night. Generally the Sierra region is not tropical although some of the deeper valleys are blessed with warm sub-tropical temperatures.

Due to the latitude, however, the only seasons are the rainy and dry ones and there is no winter or summer as we know them. The precipitous walls found in many valleys have a marked influence on the amount of rainfall an area receives. A short excursion of 10 miles in an Andean valley can take one from a Garden of Eden to a Death Valley ambience as the clouds lose their moisture on one side of the walls, while further down the valley is desert.

While altitude determines what crops can be grown, rainfall or irrigation have a strong effect on the location and yield.

Where adequate rainfall or irrigation exists, the coast is suitable for the cultivation of tropical crops such as bananas, cocoa, rice, sugar and fruits while the highlands, depending on altitude, are devoted to such foodstuffs as barley, wheat, pasture, sugar cane (in the low valleys) and temperate fruits (apples, pears, peaches, melons, etc.). The Oriente is still mostly uncleared forest but there is a potential for humid tropical crops similar to the coast. In general the highland crops are grown for the internal market whereas the coast produces most of Ecuador's exports and this fact goes far towards explaining the distinct socio-economic and cultural characteristics of the two areas.

B. HISTORY AND POPULATION

Like the majority of Latin American countries, Ecuador owes its main culture and language to the conquest of the Americas by the Spanish in the 15th and 16th centuries. Ecuador had a significant population of Indians long before the arrival of the first white man. At the time of Pizarro the city of Quito was an administrative centre for the Inca Empire. The real conquest began during a time of civil war in the Inca Empire and the Spanish profitted from this forming alliances with some Indian factions against the Inca government. Following the conquest, Ecuador became an audencia under the Spanish Empire and the Indians

were converted to Christianity. Ecuador remained a relatively backward and isolated part of the empire where the descendents of the conquistadors enriched themselves at the expense of the Indians. In the 19th century the cry of independence which had been sweeping through the Americas, led to the victory of the Criollas (those of Spanish descent born in Ecuador) over the Spanish forces and the establishment of a republic.

Bolivar's dream was to have a united Latin America after independence but that proved impossible as one alliance after another broke down. In 1830 Ecuador decided on complete independence. The country remained unstable for the rest of modern history, passing from junta to junta and from one popular orator to another. Since then Ecuador has come under the influence of the United States and a "democratic" government has been established. Also, oil has been discovered and is under production. However, the Indian population has become increasingly marginal inspite of the trend of modernization.

1. Population and Its Distribution

Ecuador's population of 7-8 million is by no means a homogenous one. Approximately 40-45% are classified as Indian, about 40% Mestizo (mixed white-Indian), 10% European and the rest Black or Chinese. The classifications are not well understood and it is possible for an Indian to be classified as Mestizo with only a change of dress and adaptation to the Spanish language.

Speaking generally, the "whites", which includes those of pure Spanish descent, other European and North Americans, tend to reside in the two large cities, Quito and Guayaquil. The Indians live predominantly in the highlands, although recently they have tended to be more dispersed, and there have traditionally been scattered tribes in the Oriente. Blacks are concentrated in the province of Esmeraldas on the North-East coast, the presumed descendants of African slaves shipwrecked at some earlier time. The Mestizos are scattered throughout the country comprising a high percentage of the population in the southern provinces.

The division of the population by socio-economic and racial groupings is evident and requires little statistical verification. At the top of the ladder are the whites and wealthy Mestizos, followed by the majority of Mestizo urban dwellers, then the Mestizo farmers and clearly at the bottom, the Indians and Blacks. Intermarriage between Indians and whites would appear to be rare and upward mobility is mainly restricted to within one's racial group.

The population growth rate for the country as a whole is about 3.1%, and is one of the highest in the world. Infant and adult mortality rates have dropped drastically over the last few years, however, infant mortality rates are higher for Indian and Black groups than for the whites or Mestizos.

Unlike most Latin American countries Ecuador does not demonstrate the primate city syndrome. Only two large cities exist, and

recent growth, due to migration, has tended not to favour the capital, Quito, but rather the financial and export centre, Guayaquil. Guayaquil (population approximately one million) contains 30.2% while Quito accounts for 22.1% of the total urban population in urban centres over 20,000. In the sense that neither Quito or Guayaquil is clearly the classical primate city, and in the sense that the two together accounted for only 52.3% of the total urban population, Ecuador is unique among Latin American countries. Some authors have referred to the Ecuadorian situation as a bipolar one but this is not really accurate as recent migration trends have favoured smaller urban centres.

2. Quito

The Sierra, including Quito, is where the oldest centres are found and where the administration of the country since the conquest has been centred.

It is in Quito that one finds all the appendages of power and bureaucracy, the government ministries, government banks and credit institutions, semi-autonomous government agencies such as IERAC (Agrarian Reform Institute) and CONADE (national planning) and the offices of many non-government agencies and enterprises doing business or lobbying for favours with the junta. Since the discovery of large deposits of oil in the Oriente in 1968 and the expansion of the export market in 1973, Quito has been experiencing an impressive construction boom particularly in the building of offices, hotels and commercial centres.

Quito has been expanding outwards, both toward the north, along the narrow valley which confines the city proper and in a leap-frog fashion over the mountains and into the surrounding valleys. In part this is explained by the topography surrounding the table upon which Quito sits. There is nowhere for Quito to go but down to the valleys in search of new space. However, there is 30% open space within the city which, even allowing for parkland and necessary public parking, is incredibly high for a Latin American urban centre. Although no hard data is available, it is probable that much land speculation is occurring, particularly since the construction boom of the 70's:

> Presently Quito has a large amount of land within the urban perimeter with the potential for construction. However, there exists a speculative retention of this land and competition among the different sectors with the ability to purchase. This has led to the conversion of land to urban uses in peripheral zones, particularly to the east of the City.*

However, speculation is not confined to the city alone but is also prevalent in the surrounding areas, particularly those well connected by road to Quito. Villages to the north of Quito along the Pan American Highway are being subjected to a wave of speculation which renders agricultural activities unprofitable. Much of the land has ceased to be used for agrarian purposes and is being held in expectation of price increases.**

---

* Carrion, Diego. Renta Del Suelo y Segregacion Urbana Quito, Colecion Premio 1978.

** Denis, Paul Y. Echanges in egaux et relations madernes dans les rapports ville-campagne en Equateur et au Bresil in Developpent Agricole Dependant et Mouvements Paysons, Universite d'Ottawa 1981.

Generally around Quito there has been a change of land uses from agriculture to tourist attractions such as restaurants, artisan boutiques, recreation centres and chalets. One of "the main effects on agriculture in the vicinity of Quito has been the division of haciendas for housing purposes. This has not really benefitted the countryside since productive lands are subdivided and abandoned to urban uses. An uncontrollable appetite for large profits on the part of land owners has accelerated this process".*

Moreover, this speculation has dislodged farmers from the land and obliged them to go to the city in order to support their families. Speculation has reached the point where land is no longer sold by hectares but by square meters.

In several places land prices are as high as in the city. In the valley of Tumbaco a hectare of land sells for $8,000 U.S. while a poor Campesino (farmer) earns $500 per year. He is of course compelled to sell.**

The industrialization of Ecuador has also led to the few modern industries seeking land outside the city where once it was less expensive. Perhaps more important however, is the demand by the bourgeoisie of Quito for principal or "summer" residences in valleys which, because of their lower altitude, have a more agreeable climate. This spurred the recent completion of the

---

* Gomez, Nelson, Quito y su Desarrollo Urbano, Editorial Camino, Quito.

** Gomez, Nelson, Op. Cit.

expressway between Quito and San Rafael in the valley of Los Chillos and has considerably shortened driving time to this agricultural important area (25 minutes driving time off peak).

Besides this leapfrog growth towards the lower valleys, Quito has grown in at least 3 other distinct ways. "New Quito" is an extension of the centre city northwards following the valley and is composed of a modern section of high rise offices, apartments, [illegible] towers, hotels and commercial centres. Much of it is still in transition as rising land values lead to conversion of old residential units into pensiones (essentially hotels formed by conversion) or into boutiques and low rise into high rise.

Some growth has also taken place on the precipitous slopes of the mountains and ravines which dissect Quito. Little clusters of houses without water or sewage appear at elevations up to 3,000 meters on the mountain Pinchincha. Many of the residents are squatters and have no legal title to this land and who are most likely immigrants from the rural countryside. The government shows no inclination to evict them, probably because the land is marginal being deforested, eroded, or above the tree line. Planners are cognizant of the servicing constraints on these settlements and there are resettlement plans underway.

One plan involves a fully serviced lot scheme for 20,000 residents in the city itself. In its simplest form the concept is to provide squatters with legal title to fully serviced land and start up materials or funds for the construction of housing.

The rest is up to them; the organization of construction brigades, the use of exchange/barter systems, the sharing of experiences, etc. The scheme has worked well in many countries of the world and allows for a progressive upgrading of the environment as wealth accumulates, rather than the more well known deterioration associated with the infamous slums of developed or undeveloped societies.

Finally, Quito has grown within the boundaries of what surely must be the most deceptive "slum" area in the world. A large section of the old city was declared by the national government and the U.N. as an historical monument in 1965. Although of outstanding aesthetic value, this area contains some of the most delapidated housing, which over the years has become severely overcrowded. Large colonial structures have been subdivided to such an extent that up to thirty families may occupy what was once a single family residence. Many migrants to Quito find temporary or permanent residence in this barrio and thus Quito does not exhibit the usual squalid squatter settlements found on the outskirts of other latin American cities.

3. Guayaquil

Located 250 km from Quito, Guayaquil might as well be situated in another world. Quito is temperate and cold at night, Guayaquil is torrid. Quito is sedate, melancholic, almost brooding. Guayaquil is loud, trumpeting, frantic and chaotic. Quito is conservative, traditional and Catholic and Guayaquil is capitalist, liberal and more secular. Quito is history and Guayaquil has claims to be the

future.

Guayaquil was built over a series of serpentine estuaries which join the Rio Guayas. It was not a natural port like Esmeraldas but it offered more protection from the Portuguese and English in the 17th century, and so a fortified city was built by the Spanish. The first major activity was boat building and later cocoa was shipped out from here. As late as 1900 the city had only 60,000 inhabitants. Unlike the towns in the Sierra, all the houses here were constructed of wood, which resulted in devastating fires. The humid, dank climate encouraged cholera, yellow fever, malaria and smallpox. Later as bananas replaced cocoa as Ecuador's chief export, Guayaquil became firmly established as a major commercial centre for U.S. based companies (United Fruit) with a concomitant growth as a commercial centre.

By the 1950's the city had a growth rate of over 5%, at least one third of it due to migration from rural areas.* Much of this growth took place in the suburbios, the estuaries around the city being filled in by waves of squatter invasions. By the late 70's over 600,000 residents were living in the suburbios, one of the largest squatter settlements in the world. Another 200,000 live in the inner city slums in multiple dwellings or in converted residences.

---

* The remaining information was supplied from interviews with various planners. Interview with Arquitecto Jorge Solomon of the City Planning Department, Guayaquil.

Most of the suburbios lack piped water and sewage while in the inner city slums, 30 or 40 families may share one water outlet.* There are no essential services other than electricity, no parks, few trees or even shrubs, few hospitals and few social services of any kind. It is a short distance from this part of Guayaquil to the sleek concrete skyscrappers, such as the Bank of America, the hotels Colon and Guayaquil with simming pools and air-conditioned suites, the cafes overlooking the water and the new and gracefully old government buildings.

C. RURAL-URBAN MIGRATION

The world as a whole is experiencing an incredible spatial and social transformation. Cities everywhere in the Developing World have been growing at unprecedented rates. In Latin America over the last 20-30 years many cities, especially the primate ones, experienced population growth rates exceeding 7% per annum.

Natural increase for most Latin American countries is between 2.8% and 3.3% per annum.** These rates, amongst the highest in the world, can be explained by factors such as a declining infant mortality rate due to improved sanitation and medical services, a strong belief that numerous children is proof of virility/ fertility and a family need for child labour in the absence of social security. The church may also play a role but it is uncertain

---

* Economista Gaitan Vilancienco, FODESO, Guayaquil.

** Ecuador has a natural increase rate of approximately 3.1%, probably in the top 5 world wide.

what influence it exerts since many governments do not follow the Vatican's line on birth control or abortion.*

1. Theoretical Base

A good deal of research and speculation has been devoted to the causes of migration, who the migrants are, the mechanisms by which they adapt to the urban environment, and the net effect of this large scale movement from the rural areas. For the purposes of this paper only a very condensed and simplified summary will be presented.

Factors considered to be causally related to migration are categorized as being either of the "push" or "pull" variety. While the "push" factors are considered to be those which act to force people to leave their farms or country villages, "pull" factors are those which draw potential migrants to the city. Considerable controversy surrounds the relative weight or influence of these categories, a not altogether academic argument since any policy designed to deal with extremes of city growth must have a clear image of the relative importance to attach to push or pull variables. Both "push" and "pull" exert their forces simultaneously.

Examples of push factors include the maldistribution of land holdings which leave too little land available for the peasants

---

* The above figures are given only to point out the intensity of population growth, both from migration and natural increase, taking place in Latin America (and worldwide in developing countries).

while concentrating resources in the hands of the wealthy, land-owning elite or multinational. This can also come about as the result of subdivision of land through generations, resulting in small marginal holdings. Land erosion and exhaustion are often due to the use of farming methods more appropriate to lower population densities. For example, much of the Andean area has suffered mild to severe erosion.

Natural calamities include drought, insect plagues, hurricanes and floods. Since much of the third world lacks efficient communications, support systems or security, these forces wreck havoc more than they do in developed societies.

Another factor is man-made calamities such as war or revolution. La Violencia in Columbia lasted some 100 years and resulted in thousands of deaths mainly in the countryside. The revolution in El Salvador will likewise cause an influx into the cities.

There are also "pull factors" such as the bright lights of the city. The city offers escape from the constricted lifestyle permitted in rural areas.

While income differentials are difficult to calculate, studies have demonstrated that urban wages, even in the least desirable sectors, exceed rural wages by amounts significant enough to encourage potential migrants - even when the possibility of finding work is limited by insufficient industrialization and a small tertiary sector. On the other hand costs are higher in the city.

The difference between the two represents the drawing weight of this variable.*

In Ecuador the land tenure system is perhaps the main cause of rural-urban migration. According to a recent I.D.R.C. study** small farmers and landless rural labourers made up nine tenths of the entire farm population in Ecuador in 1966. The situation has not changed much since then, even with the apparent enactment of land reforms by the national government; for example the Law of Agrarian Reform 1964, and decree 1001, 1970. What has occurred is a small reduction in the proportion of smallest holdings and the formation of an incipient middle class peasantry. Nevertheless there is still a large labour surplus in the agrarian sector receiving a suppressed wage level. Also, there are various forms of credit granting which keep peasants in a continual state of indigence and dependancy. In one "village" I recorded the following conversation:

Question: Where do you get your water from?

Answer: Our water comes from the hacienda (a large farm belonging to the landlord's family). It is dirty. We asked the government for clean water but nothing has been done.

---

* For an interesting example of this kind of study see Van Ginneken, Rural and Urban Income Inequalities, I.L.O. Geneva 1976. Also see Todar, M.P. Internal Migration in Developing Countries, I.L.O. Geneva 1976.

** I.D.R.C. Social Change and Internal Migration, Ottawa, 1976.

Question: How much land do you possess?

Answer: None, we work for the boss. He pays us 30 sucres a day (about $1.50 Canadian). When we are sick, we do not get paid. We are asking the government for land. So far, we have nothing. Sometimes we go to the city to work where we receive 50-60 sucres a day for work in construction. We supplement this from time to time by the selling of animals for 300-400 sucres each.

According to the Agrarian census of 1974 there were still 280,974 farms of less than 10 hectares of land. This represents 87.1% of the total number of properties and 18.2% of the total cultivated area. (Fig. #1). Conversely there were 86 farms of over 2,500 hectares each, representing 15.3% of the total cultivated area.

FIGURE 1

SIZE & DISTRIBUTION OF FARMS

Size category (hectares)	Number	% of total farms	Total Area (hectares)	% of Total Cultivated Area
0-10	280,974	87.1	560,800	18.24
10-50	32,064	9.93	663,092	21.56
50-100	6,014	1.86	368,043	11.97
100-500	2,935	0.90	504,702	16.41
500-1000	312	.96	205,714	6.69
1000-2500	201	.06	300,869	9.78
2500	86	.02	471,054	15.32
TOTAL	322,586	100.00	3,074,274	100.00

Source = Censo Agropecuario de 1974

However, what is even more revealing is the average size of the farms in each category. (Fig. #2).

FIGURE 2

AVERAGE SIZE OF FARMS IN EACH CATEGORY

Size category (hectares)	1954 August	1974 August
0-10	2.1	1.9
10-50	19.8	20.6
1000-2500	1443.2	1496.8
2500 +	6378.2	5477.3

Source = Censo Agropecuario de 1954 & 1974

The table shows the incredibly small average holdings in the first category representing 87% of all farms. They are, on the average, only 1.9 hectares in size, a decrease since 1954.

In summary, despite several agrarian reform laws, (encouraged by the Kennedy regime in reaction to the Cuban revolution) the situation has hardly improved at all.*

The agrarian question also has a price or cost side to it as well. What has occurred in Ecuador, as elsewhere in Latin America, is a steady increase in the agro-business sector at the expense of subsistence agriculture. Between 1969-1977 export crops such

---

* 15 years of Agrarian Reform in Ecuador
Quince A. Quince anos de Reform Agrarian en el Ecuador
Centro de Investigaciones y estudios socio-economicos Quito.

as coffee, african palm and bananas increased considerably in tonnage.* On the other hand crops consumed by peasants or poor urban workers decreased significantly, resulting in higher prices. Potatoes and wheat tonnages for example have undergone drastic declines over the last 20 years.

The result is higher prices for the essential foods of the lowest [illegible] reduction in jobs as it is these crops that require most labour. This is one more reason for the exodus from the rural areas.

Surprisingly rural out-migration can sometimes result from increasing rural productivity. For example on a 15,000 hectare hacienda in Ecuador, owned by Swedish interests, half of the workers/residents were dismissed after technological improvements were introduced.**

Another example is given by Linguist.*** At the Plasaqui estate the traditional crop production, maize (corn), was being replaced by dairy production which promised higher returns to the owners of

---

* Cocoa increased between 1969-1974 but then decreased between 1975-1977.

** Barraclough, S.L. & Domike, A.L. in Nisbet C.T. Latin America. Problems in Economic Development, N.Y. The Free Press 1969, 91-131.

*** Lindquist, Sven, Land and Power in South America, Penguin Books, 1979.

the hacienda. After an interview with the patron, Lindquist summed up as follows:

> Under the new management, thanks to mechanization and to turning the hacienda over to milk production, its economic yield had improved considerably. The change had been carried through without any essential rise in his wage bill. On the contrary, wages had fallen, both as a share of the total operational costs and in relation to his own income. The hacienda's supply of cheap submissive labour seemed to have been secured for the future and with its present yeild Patron Pedro was in a position to mechanize still further. Gradually, if he wished to do so, he could make himself even less dependent on labour.

Erosion in Ecuador is so evident that it hardly requires the testimony of statistics. Whole valleys and hillsides are visibly denuded leaving only blowing sand topsoil. A U.N. report in 1974 tied the problem in with land tenure.

> In the agricultural sector inadequate farming practices, associated with prevailing systems of land tenure and the response of landlords to prevailing social and economic incentives have led to the neglect of millions of hectares of good agricultural land and abandonment of marginal areas.
>
> Overgrazing has ruined natural pasture land and has led to consequent wind or water erosions; slash and burn techniques for land clearance have deforested large areas; and in zones of commercial forestry, attempts to replant the cleared areas are rare. Again the results can be seen in the widescale erosion, the permanent descending of hill country, the consequent silting of rivers and the creation of conditions leading to recurrent flooding over large areas.*

---

* U.N. 1974 Population, environment and development: the Latin American Experience, Economic Bulletin for Latin America, 1961/2, 10-28.

In Ecuador as in many other developing countries, there are at least two distinct types of migratory movements. More limited in effect is the temporary kind which involves movements of peasants from region to region or from countryside to city in search of supplementary income. In the second case (countryside - city) migration is often a result of very low rural incomes and wages that are relatively high in the cities, even for unskilled labour. The majority of these migrants do not receive the official minimum wage because their labour is contracted in the informal marketplace. In Ecuador this type of migrant is overwhelmingly male and tends to find employment on a daily or weekly basis in construction, hauling, markets or begging.

In a study carried out by Gilda Farrel of the Universidad Catholica, of 140 temporary migrants, it was found that over half worked in construction (57.5%) and over one quarter as haulers (28.9%). Of the total sample 68.7% were landowners but the large majority of this group (78.9%) had parcels smaller than 5 hectares. It is important to distinguish hectares which are irrigated from those which are not, since 5 hectares of adequately watered and well conserved land could support a family. But most of the temporary migrants to Quito are Indians and most Indian land lacks irrigation. A larger sample (1060) revealed that over 50% of the migrants from one of the poorest provinces held less than a hectare of land whereas of those originating in other provinces 37-51% held less than 2 hectares.

Furthermore 68% of those with less than 1 hectare had inherited their land whereas 66% with more than ten hectares had purchased the land. The above statistics are useful in underlining the improverishment of the temporary migrants and the effects of this poverty on their decision to migrate. Simply stated, it is necessity which forces these peasants to seek supplementary employment in cities. On the positive side, the campesino can accumulate some savings by living cheaply in the cities and even purchasing food for his animals and other goods in the less expensive markets of Quito or Guayaquil. On the negative side the migration leads to a surplus of cheap labour, makes unionization a difficult process, disrupts campesino family life and does little to encourage a more productive agriculture sector.

Permanent migration occurs when peasants, townspeople or urban residents move from one region to another, from country or town to city or from city to another country. Up until the last decade, the patterns of migration were from the Sierra mountain region to the coastal belt and from the countrysides of both areas to the largest cities (Quito and Guayaquil). There is the common idea that the growth of the primate city occurs at an ever increasing rate and at the expense of the countryside.

In Ecuador the opposite appears to be occurring. The rate of urbanization was slower between 1962-74 (4.8%) when compared to 1950-62 (4.5%), while the rate of rural growth increased (1.89%/ 1950-62, 2.5%/1962-74). Secondly the concept of a primate, or even of a bipolar dominated growth structure has recently been

contradicted by the appearance of a redistribution of population favouring middle sized cities. The proportion of urban population accounted for by Quito and Guayaquil together, rose from 51.3% in 1950 to 53.7% in 1962 and then descended to 52.3% in 1974. At the same time cities of 20,000+ (excluding Quito and Guayaquil) increased their share of urban population from 13.1% to 23.9%. The number of cities between 20,000 - 100,000 exceeded 20 in 1974 and is probably around 25 today. The growth rate for this group was 7.2% annually whereas for Quito and Guayaquil it was 4.4% and 4.0% respectively.*

The picture that emerges is that of rapid urbanization of both Guayaquil and Quito but at a decreasing rate, whereas the smaller urban centres, for the first time in recent history, appear to be growing faster than the two metropolis. In the words of the National Plan:

> The existence of these intermediary cities, in addition to a number of small essentially non-rural towns from 2,000 - 10,000 inhabitants to a large extent determines migratory behaviour. In fact, the dominant movement is from the countryside to these towns and intermediate cities, generally undertaken after a number of tentative movements such as those from one rural area to another. These towns and cities have been transformed into population retaining areas in a way which impedes or slows down migration towards the large cities.**

---

* Plan Nacional de Desarrollo (Master Plan of Quito), La Poblacion (population), de Quito, 101-102.

** Plan Nacional de Quito, La Poblacion, p. 103 (Author's Translation)

Should this trend continue, decentralization of the population will occur resulting in a pattern which is probably better than the more usual one of overpopulation/underemployment of the primate cities. However, this must be viewed in the context of an already acute situation, especially in Guayaquil, and the continued rapid growth of this city in tandem with the rapid growth of the coastal area.

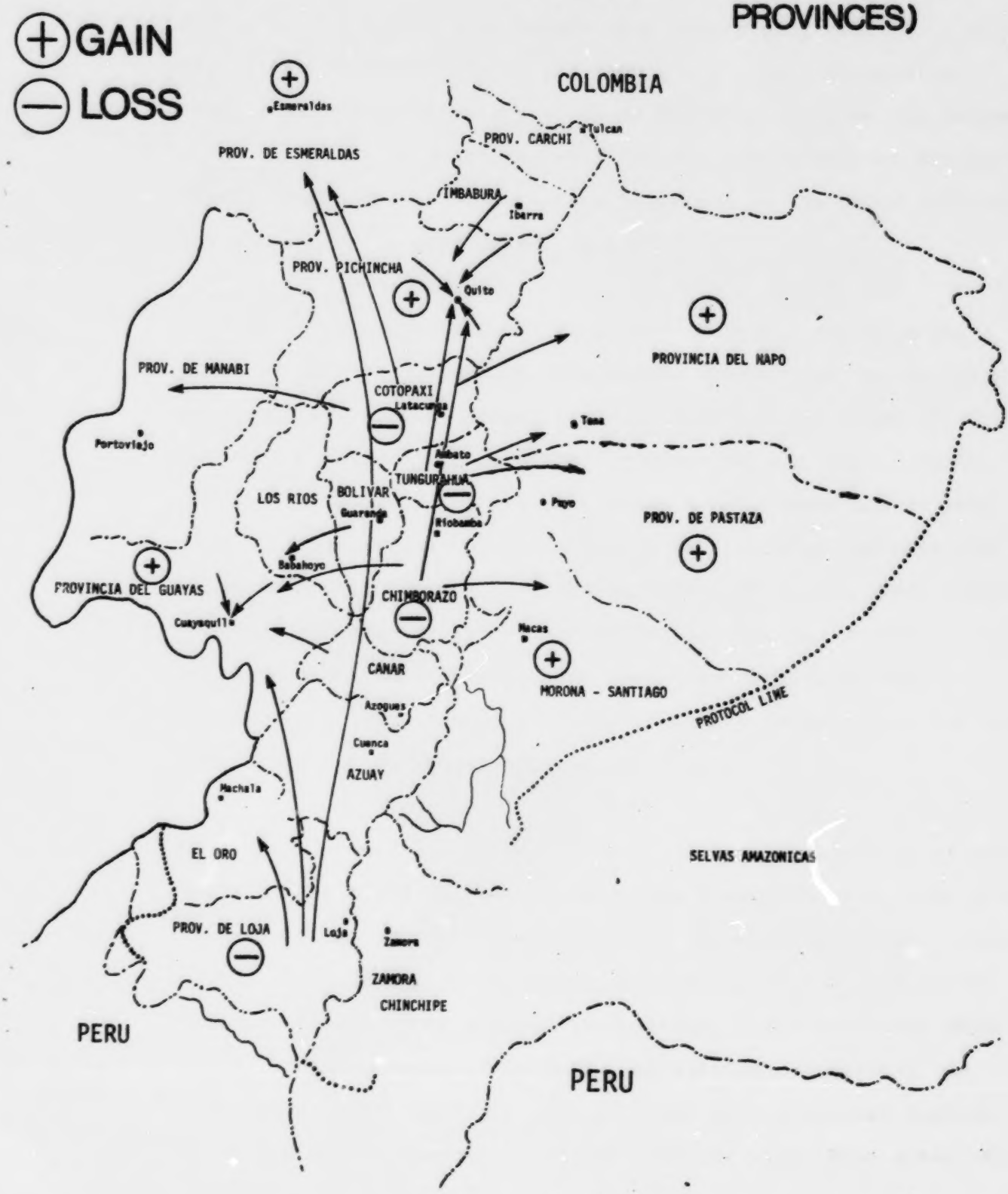
Another trend over the last decade has been the migration of people from the highlands, and even the coast, into the Oriente-Amazon area. In fact the highest level net migration growth occurred in the four Oriente provinces during the the early 1970's. There are two reasons for this: colonization of agricultural and cattle lands, and employment generated from petroleum discoveries.

Oil is taken from wells deep in the Oriente jungle and then piped over the Andes to the coast where it is partially refined and exported overseas or used domestically. This activity has been nationalized by the government and they are encouraging colonization of surrounding areas by peasants to supply workers and management at the wells with foodstuffs for example. It is foreseen that this agricultural activity will become independent of the oil developments

Critics feel that the colonization scheme is a ploy to divert attention from agrarian reform which must deal directly with the more fertile lands of the Sierra. There is also the question of Indian land claims to the Oriente lands to be decided. Other

PRINCIPAL MIGRATION MOVEMENTS

(BETWEEN AND WITHIN PROVINCES)



areas of colonization are found on the coastal foothills of the Andes around Santo Domingo and have met with greater success due to the more fertile land and the superior existing infrastructure in the area.

Another kind of migration has taken place in Ecuador over the last few years. In the extreme south, the provinces of Loja and El Oro have experienced long periods of extreme drought. The population pushed off the land settled in regions as far away as Esmeraldas where they purchased small quantities of land or found work in the petroleum industry* in the city of Esmeraldas.

The permanent immigrants to Quito and Guayaquil tend to be better educated, have a higher income or accumulated wealth and be more skilled than the general population of their area of origin. Indeed they are generally better off than the marginal population already in the cities.

A different situation applies to the temporary migrants. As pointed out earlier many of these are the direct consequence of the maldistribution of land. They are generally more improverished, less educated and less skilled than the general population in their rural area and certainly less than the established marginal residents in the cities.

It is estimated that about 37% of Quito's population is the result of permanent migration and it is almost certainly higher in

---

* Interview with Economist Gonzalo Galiano Perez of the Provincial Council (Consejo Provincial), Esmeraldas.

Guayaquil. Temporary migrants are not captured by the census and so go uncounted, even though they undoubtedly make a significant contribution to the population at any given time. Thus, even though temporary migrants are constantly moving between urban and rural area and may be different individuals at different times, they comprise an important component of the urban population and should not be overlooked.

Similar to other Latin American cities Guayaquil exhibits the acres of shantys, wooden or cane shacks which flank the mountain-sides or fill in the swamps, railway yards and all kinds of physically marginal lands which surround the anti-septic North American core. On the one hand these shanty towns can be seen as a physical expression of inegalitarian policies while on the other hand they can be perceived as 'Slums of Hope', where peoples' energies and creativity can be channelled into the gradual improvement of their environment and given support by the government. The situation of the residents is better in the city than in the countryside, even at the start.

One possible solution being attempted is the legalization of the lands by the municipal government. In Guayaquil there have been several struggles over legalization of the squatter areas. One of the first invasions of squatters occurred in 1950 and led to armed conflict. This started the pattern, which continues until today, of the government enacting legislation recognizing de facto squatters' rights to land occupied in a piecemeal fashion. Every few years, especially around election time, some areas are

A common view of the newer squatter areas in Guayaquil. Electricity is the only evident public service. The houses, built of cane are elevated above the water by mangrove stilts which decay very slowly in water. Communications between houses is by boardwalks or boat.

Graphic: Imre Koroknay

This scene of a more mature section of the suburbio shows houses with a second storey in cane and a new construction on the left in brick. Some of the buildings have their ground floor converted into stores for locally sold goods. Some of the roads are paved and may even have asphalt curbs.

Graphic: Imre Koroknay

legalized in exchange for promises of votes. There is much evidence of the dynamic quality of squatter settlements once title has been assured. On several excursions into an area I was visually and verbally bombarded with examples of improvements in housing, roads and social services. The energy and evident devotion of the people to their barrio was in strong contrast to the depressed, introspective and morose highland villages I had visited, and it was obvious that here poor people retained a faith and optimism in their future in society.

Yet the difficulties faced by these squatters are enormous. A total lack of sewage disposal in a high density area is an obvious health hazard. Water must be purchased from delivery companies whose prices and standards are dubious. There are few schools and daycare centres. Thus there is an unquestionable need for more resources in these areas which must be free of government paternalism and patronage.

D. SQUATTERS AND POLITICIAN MOVEMENTS

A question which preoccupies many local and national governments in developing countries has to do with the possibility of migrants, turned squatters, being converted to political ideologies of contestation.

While migrants are more likely to be conservative rather than reformist or radical in character, nevertheless local and municipal governments view their arrival and establishment in the cities with apprehension. This is partly due to the fact that these

migrants/squatters will require land and much of that land will be owned by the government or its friends. However, many local governments, including Guayaquil, have learned to live with the situation and through cleverly devised schemes, to manipulate it in favour of themselves and their coterie of friends. A greater concern is the potential for political confrontation should the economic expectations and optimism of the migrants be transformed into despair or hostility as a result of poverty and underemployment. The possibility of leftist movements with strong support cannot be overlooked and provides disquiet to even the most impervious of local and national governments. After land title, the most evident need of migrants is employment opportunities.

It appears that there are two distinct groups found in most squatter areas. These are the self-employed on one hand and the salaried on the other. It is suggested that the balance between the groups and the social mobility within the groups partially determines the political response of the area to outside forces. But another equally important determinant appears to be the general attitude of the population in the country as a whole.

For Guayaquil, the only city in Ecuador with a real and significant squatter settlement, there is little available on the subject. From interviews and conversations with groups in the squatter areas, the impression received was principally that of a reformist-conservative atmosphere, although this may very well be illusory. In the last elections, the combined left received only 5% of the vote and the suburbios cast their ballot overwhelmingly for a

popularist mayor who generally supports the status quo.

The evidence of political movements arising from squatter settlements is sparse. The acceptance of the status quo can be explained by social mobility within the settlement and the perception by residents that their position, relative to that existing in the countryside, has actually improved. The latter is particularly true where the problem of legal tenure has been resolved and where expulsion is no longer a possibility.

E. SUMMARY

In a short period of time the world's population will become predominantly urban as emigration from rural areas continues. Ecuador is experiencing this phenomenon but in some ways it is atypical as the migration impacts on the mid sized towns as well as on the two main cities. However, the principal consequence of this migration is still the familiar squatter settlements.

It is now well known that the root cause of this migration in Latin America is the inequitable distribution of land, the "modernization" of agriculture, and the concentrations of new employment opportunities in the cities. Further, it is questionable whether the governments have the interest or will to rectify this situation by policies which are more than band aid approaches. While regional planning has gained wide acceptance in Latin America, it offers little promise unless it is undertaken in conjunction with a real agrarian reform.

In the absence of the latter commitment, regional planning can resolve only a minor redistribution of population with a recurrence of squatter settlements over a greater spatial area.

Therefore, real agrarian reform is essential in Latin America and it must involve not only the break up of family compact lands but also the technical support and funding for peasants and co-operatives. In the past there have been many sham attempts, but with the exception of Cuba and for a short period Mexico, nearly all have become bogged down in the quagmire of a feudal-capitalist corruption. To many the choice is either true land reform or growing squatter settlements.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lawrence Altrows received his Masters degree in planning from the Faculté d'Aménagement at the Université de Montreal. After working as a planner in Montreal and Ottawa he joined the faculty at Ryerson where he teaches courses on housing and planning in developing countries. Last summer he was in Ecuador with World University Services of Canada studying rural-urban migration and urban problems.

Additional copies of this paper are available, at no charge, from:

Editor, Occasional Paper Series
Department of Urban and Regional Planning
Ryerson Polytechnical Institute
50 Gould Street
Toronto
Ontario M5B 1E8.

Copies of the bibliography used in the preparation of this Occasional Paper are available from Professor Altrows.